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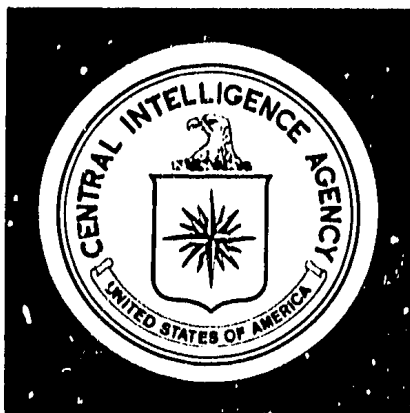
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## *Developments in Indochina*

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## *Developments in Indochina*

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[redacted] the Khmer Communists have not had any significant military victories in this area since the US bombing halt a month ago. Both sides now appear to be focusing on the battle for the provincial capital of Kompong Cham.

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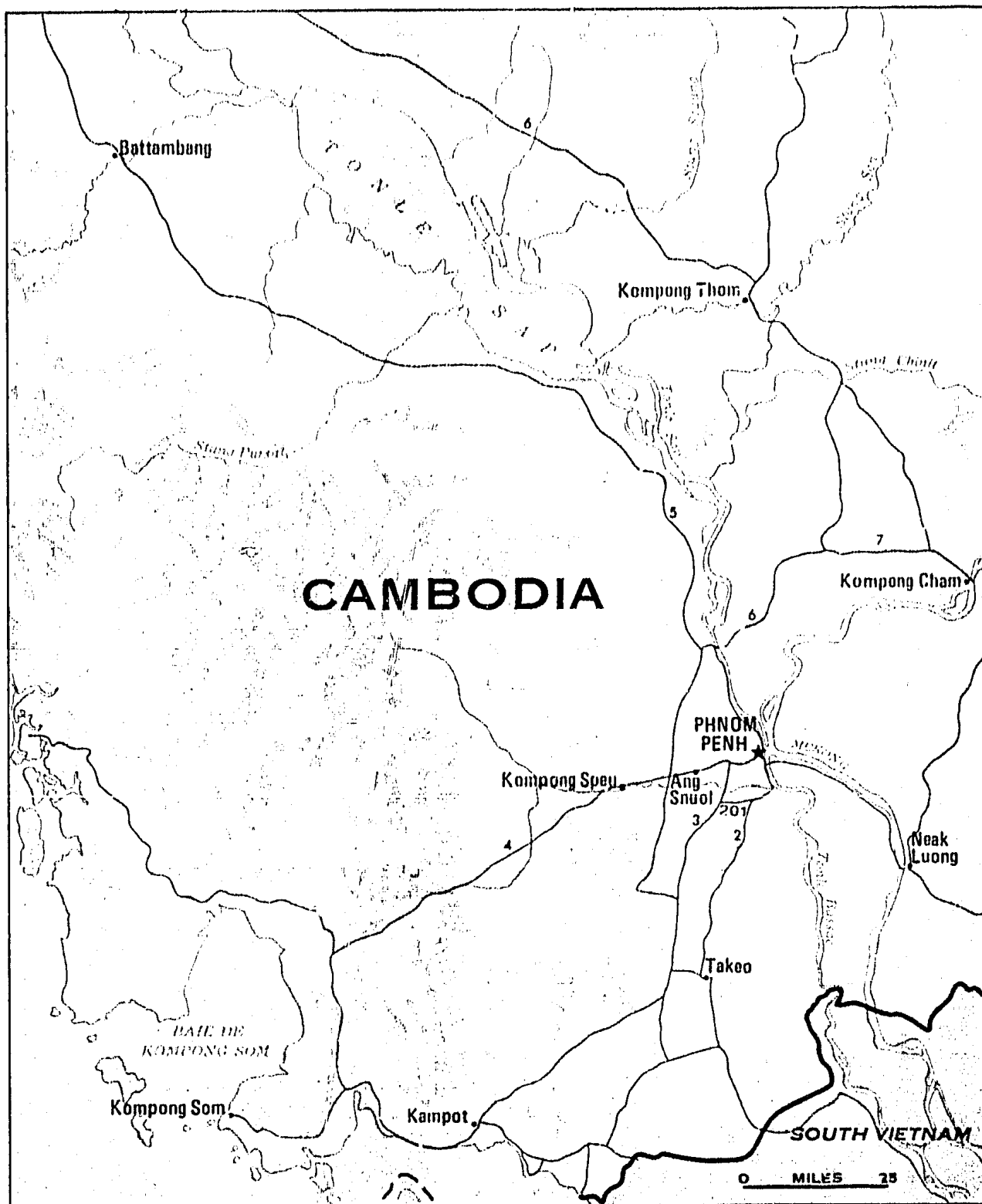
After almost seven months of tortuous negotiations, Prime Minister Souvanna is on the threshold of signing the peace agreement negotiated last February.

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President Thieu will make a state visit to Thailand--and perhaps to other Southeast Asian countries--in early November.

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Although the PRG has made some international diplomatic gains since the cease-fire, the Communists are not trying very hard inside South Vietnam to promote the PRG as Saigon's equal.



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CAMBODIA

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A Military Balance Sheet

Since the US bombing halt in Cambodia went into effect almost a month ago, the Khmer Communists have not had any significant military victories. The insurgents' most glaring military shortcomings have been in the Phnom Penh area, where earlier in the summer their offensive had reached alarming proportions. Their recent efforts to recapture this momentum have fared poorly.

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Insurgent units have succeeded in gaining control of short stretches of Route 4--thereby keeping the capital cut off from the seaport of Kompong Som-- and of Route 5 linking Phnom Penh to the northwest. South of the capital, insurgent forces suffered a sharp setback in attacks along Route 1, and their operations along Routes 2 and 3 have been limited to small-scale initiatives. No attacks have been launched against major government defense lines northwest of the capital, and only a few minor terrorist incidents have occurred in Phnom Penh.

Although flooding and manpower shortages have impeded the insurgent efforts, the Cambodian Army has responded remarkably well to Communist pressure. In turning back the insurgent attacks on Route 1, the

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army's 1st Division has temporarily knocked the wind out of Communist forces in the Mekong River corridor. Elements of the 2nd and 3rd divisions defending routes 2 and 201 have also fought well and have held the insurgents to small gains in this area. Effective artillery support has been a major factor in blunting insurgent efforts in both sectors.

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Insurgent strength in the capital area is probably greatest along Route 4 near Ang Snuol, 15 miles west of the capital, but insurgent units in this region have been content merely to interdict the highway and have made no move toward Pochentong airport or other key installations along Route 4 closer to Phnom Penh.

Given the prospects for a continued stalemate in the Phnom Penh area, both sides have a major stake in the outcome of the fighting at Kompong Cham. Recognizing the psychological lift that the capture of the northern provincial capital would give to their war effort, the insurgents have assembled a force of between 4,000 and 5,000 troops for the effort to liberate Kompong Cham. The Cambodian Army has responded by stripping some of Phnom Penh's major defense lines to send more than 3,000 reinforcements to Kompong Cham and by committing itself publicly to the defense of the city.

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LAOS

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Down the Home Stretch

After almost seven months of tortuous negotiations, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma is on the threshold of signing the draft protocol of the peace agreement that was concluded with the Lao Communists in February. The cabinet approved the document on 11 September; it was initialed by the two sides on 12 September. The long-awaited formal signing ceremony will take place in Vientiane on 14 September. It will officially mark an end to years of military conflict in Laos and presumably will usher in a new period of political competition between Souvanna and his followers and the Pathet Lao.

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Once the protocol is signed, Souvanna's next task will be to ease the protocol by the National Assembly. That body, which is dominated by the rightist Sananikone family, has in the past opposed Souvanna on many issues. In anticipation of some assembly opposition to the protocol, Souvanna may decide merely to discuss the agreement with the deputies rather than submit it to them for formal approval.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

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Thieu's Travel Plans

President Thieu will travel to Thailand for a three-day state visit in early November, ostensibly to thank the Thais for supporting South Vietnam during the war. The short and formal nature of the visit will allow little time for discussion of substantive issues.

Thieu originally had planned to visit Bangkok in August during a goodwill trip to several Southeast Asian countries, but the trip was delayed when the South Vietnamese and the Thais could not agree on protocol arrangements.

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ANNEX

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The PRG: Fact or Fiction

The formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam was announced in 1969, when Hanoi apparently began to believe that a governmental entity was needed to advance Communist ambitions for a share of political power in the South. From the start, the PRG was more image than fact; a Vietnamese Communist once wrote, "The establishment of the provisional government is more a matter of words than reality." The PRG was touted as an outgrowth of the National Liberation Front, the mass organization set up in 1960 as the ostensible overseer of the "revolution." Although the Communists demanded much on the PRG's behalf throughout the peace talks in Paris, Hanoi eventually signed a cease-fire agreement that added little to the status, and less to the power, of the PRG.

In the South

In Communist-controlled areas of South Vietnam, nearly all governmental functions are performed by elements of the Communist military or party structure. Communist-controlled parts of Quang Tri Province are run directly from North Vietnam, and from all reports, the rest of the Communist area is still run by the military-party organs under COSVN.

The PRG has "ministries," but they are nothing more than paper organizations staffed by personnel who wear a more important hat in COSVN. The "ministers" are no better than middle-ranking cadres, according to one defector. The PRG's lack of status--indeed of its virtual non-existence--was revealed when the "PRG" delegations to the Four-Party and Two-Party Joint Military Commissions were named. Almost without exception these individuals came from the Communist Party and military structure. No pretense was made that they were responsive in

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any significant way to a civilian government or even directly associated with one.

International Activities

The PRG does show signs of life on the international scene, where it is constantly striving for greater visibility and for an image of independence. Since the signing of the peace agreement, PRG envoys have been scurrying around in search of recognition, especially among the smaller, nonaligned nations, and the North Vietnamese have made a special effort to give overseas PRG missions the appearance of independence in day-to-day diplomatic matters. The southerners have been encouraged, for example, to arrive at diplomatic functions on their own. Hanoi has not, however, been willing to force the issue of recognition of the PRG on third-world countries planning to recognize Hanoi. The North Vietnamese usually make an initial effort to include recognition of the PRG in a package deal, but back off from insisting that this is a condition for relations with Hanoi.

The PRG diplomatic drive has had limited success. Since the cease-fire agreement the PRG has been recognized by a number of countries, and its representatives were seated at the Georgetown and Algiers nonaligned conferences. In June, the Communist allies helped a little by accrediting ambassadors to the PRG, but none of the ambassadors stayed around after the ceremonies. Two major setbacks--at the hands of the UN and France--have been particularly galling. The UN, under heavy US pressure, decided not to grant the PRG observer status. The French have refused to give even quasi-diplomatic status to the PRG information office in Paris while raising Saigon's representation to embassy level. What probably disturbs PRG officials most about the current state of their relations with Paris is the implicit acknowledgment by the French, who are trying to reassert their influence in Vietnam, that Saigon and Hanoi are the two forces that count.

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Bolstering the Image at Home

25X1 An even more difficult problem for the Communists is how to enhance the status of the PRG among Vietnamese. Ngyuen Van Hieu, head of the PRG delegation to the Paris bilateral talks and one of the few effective Viet Cong spokesmen, is trying to increase Vietnamese support for the PRG by toning down its communist coloration. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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25X1 In South Vietnam, the Communists do not seem to be pushing so hard these days to portray the PRG as Saigon's equal. The talk and rumor about the imminent establishment of a capital, so prominent at the time of the PRG's fourth anniversary celebrations in June, have disappeared. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] now says that the PRG is "no longer" planning to establish a capital in South Vietnam. The PRG's goal, he says, is not to divide the South into two rival political entities, but

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rather to have one "government of national concord" with a single capital. [ ] rejects the view that the PRG has decided not to set up a capital because it fears the South Vietnamese or the US would bomb it. [ ] US air intervention is unlikely and the South Vietnamese would be discouraged by Communist anti-aircraft.

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The establishment of a capital poses a number of difficulties for the PRG. Although it would boost the PRG's prestige and image as a legitimate government, it would also undercut Hanoi's long-standing insistence that Vietnam--North and South--is one country. This commitment to one Vietnam is one reason why Hanoi stops short of allowing the PRG to establish a full-fledged diplomatic office in the North Vietnamese capital.

The modified objectives apparent in the recent comments of PRG spokesmen probably reflect the current mood in the North. Hanoi most likely believes that any gains to be made at this time on the political front in the South will have to come from an erosion of Saigon's control at the local level rather than by the maneuverings of the PRG. For the Communists, the PRG is a vehicle for sharing political power with the Saigon government, and its time has not yet come. As long as Communist political power in the South is as limited as it is today, it probably does not make much difference whether the PRG is more shadow than substance. [ ]

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